

# Life of the Spirit

A BLACKFRIARS REVIEW



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# Life of the Spirit

A review devoted to the theology and practice of prayer and the spiritual life, it is designed to assist in the re-establishment of the Catholic tradition of ascetical and mystical writing in the English language. Contributors are therefore encouraged to submit original MSS. or translations from the Fathers.

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# Life of the Spirit

Vol. I

MAY 1947

No. 11

## PRAYER

BY

BEDE JARRETT, O.P.<sup>1</sup>



THE purpose, then, of our life here is union with God, the one thing that gives meaning to our existence; and this union has been made possible through the coming of our blessed Lord. In that work of union we shall find our peace. We speak of the attempt as *prayer*. Prayer is the raising up of our hearts and souls to God, and this is the work of union to raise the heart and soul. Whenever you have got this you have got prayer, for prayer means getting into communication with God. Prayer is not simply acquiescing, not simply kneeling, or speaking words, but lifting up, getting into God's presence. Heaven is prayer eternal. Rest is prayer when the union is present. By prayer we come into contact with God. God is infinite and we are finite.

Our minds are so constituted that we cannot think of many things at once without getting tired and flustered. Sight-seeing is tiring, so many things to see at once that we are fatigued. We can't understand God. The real knowledge of God is a supernatural power. Some day we shall see God, here we must live by faith. If we understood God it would cease to be faith, wouldn't it? Prayer isn't feeling or loving, at least not the feeling of loving. The saints only experienced this feeling for short periods in prayer. St Teresa says half an hour, St Bernard the space of an *Our Father*. When we experience it we must be grateful for it, as we are grateful for the sunshine, for flowers, not despising it; never, St Teresa says, asking for it—it is not prayer.

In prayer the heart touches God. It is living on the heights and it is a little bleak, a little cold on the hills. Prayer is a doing without—can you dare that? Perseverance is difficult. We find it difficult to persevere in anything. We can hold out our arms for a minute easily, but for an hour we cannot. Yet to persevere is what we have to do in prayer in spite of lack of feeling. Life is an obstacle race, all sorts of difficulties to be overcome and we must ask God to enable us to

<sup>1</sup> From a retreat preached in Edinburgh in July, 1932.

get over the difficulties. He dreaded death and triumphed over it on the cross. He makes us walk in darkness. Without perseverance our lives are failures. Satisfaction of heart and intelligence are withheld.

What do I hope for in prayer? What do I talk to God about? People I am interested in, my shortcomings, my work uninteresting and tiresome, the things I want, spiritual gifts, and I ask God to give me my desires. I can't alter God. Only created things change. He does not alter his mind because I ask him, it were blasphemy to think so. How can I affect God? He intended from the beginning to give and intended that I should ask, *should pray*. While I pray there has been a changing of my heart, I have given up my will. Prayer forces me to climb, to catch a glimpse of wisdom; you see, not pulling God down but climbing up through the one Mediator. Prayer makes us in a sense divine. It is the magic wand of the fairy tale which changes the ugly duckling into a prince, and we seem, as indeed we are, of the blood royal. Prayer gives peace, strength, takes self away and puts in its place God—takes my own heart out of me, 'My child, give me thy heart'. David was a man after God's own heart—not God after David's. We shall have peace if we keep in step with God. Tranquil, rest on God. Life is a changing, a growth, God is unchanging.

Prayer brings its own reward even here; it gives strength and endurance and peace beyond belief. It calms when we are irritated and flustered. Prayer carries us right away from the worries of life and gives us rest, takes us right into the very presence of God. We have left this world and wander in the meadows and on the hills of God—the reward of those who forget self and remember God. Out of prayer come courage, strength, power to meet life's trials and troubles. Intercourse with God makes us like to God, even as unconsciously we are affected by the personality of one whose speech is essentially refined and delicate, so that we instinctively drop our slang and become more gentle in their presence, or we cease to grumble in the presence of certain others. If our fellow beings can thus affect us, won't God's presence affect us a little more strongly, shall we not lose a little more of ourselves, forget the ugly things around us when in touch with the beauty ever new of our God? 'Too little have I known thee, O Beauty ever ancient and ever new.' Union with God will lift us up into a peace beyond this life, that peace which comes from union with his will but is compatible with suffering. It will also give us strength and make us more intensely *alive*, responsive, always, as we say, on the spot. Our Lady was intense in everything she did, so in an even greater degree was our Lord. The world to him was God's beautiful world, to him the spar-

rows and the lilies and the fields white for the harvest were lovable because he saw and loved their beauty. We want to be alive and not tired—half dead, don't we? And that is what prayer does for us. Isn't that worth while? This little mind and heart lifted to the ancient Beauty, he is ours to see with the mind of faith, to love with the heart, but we must clamber up above ourselves and the turmoil of the world if we would hear the gentle wind of his approach, feel the stir of his presence. By our *faith* not *feeling*. His powerful personality overwhelms us.

We shall have constant peace, that peace which is strength, not the listless peace of sitting with our hands in our laps, but strength to walk in stride with God, no longer walking tired but with a swing as the Master walked in the cornfields and the cobbled streets. If we lead a life of prayer in faith we shall be strong, able to meet whatever the day brings.

## CONCERNING PRAISE

BY

S. M. ALBERT, O.P.

**R**ELIGION', says St Thomas, 'denotes properly a relation to God' and 'consists essentially in those acts by which man worships God by subjecting himself to his lordship'. (*Summa*, II-II, 81, 1). Whenever there is a special kind of lordship, there must be a special kind of service, and it is evident that lordship belongs to God in a special and singular way, because he made all things and has supreme dominion over all. Therefore a special kind of service is due to him, called 'religion', 'piety', or 'worship' (*Ibid.* ad 3. Cf. *In Boeth*: 3, 2).

But this worship must be of a fitting nature both as regards its object and as regards the one by whom it is offered. Its object, God, is a spirit, and therefore his worship must consist essentially in acts whereby the mind or soul is directed to him. But the worshipper is man composed of body and soul; wherefore his acts of worship must include a bodily element, both to give God the service of the whole man, and to incite himself to internal acts of religion by external ones—'from things seen to the love of things unseen'.

Thus by acts of religion man bears witness to the excellence of God and to his own subjection to him, his Creator, Conserver and Redeemer; and the proper and immediate interior act of religion is devotion in its theological sense, while the exterior acts are *adoration*,

wherein is offered the service of the body; *sacrifice*, whereby are offered external things, and those acts such as oaths, etc., whereby something divine is assumed. (Cf. II-II, 81, 3; 84).

'Adoration consists chiefly in an interior reverence of God; but secondly in certain bodily signs of humility'. (Ibid. 84, 2 ad 2). In its exterior form, it is only one of the manifestations of the virtue of religion; but in its interior aspect it is '*l'attitude la plus fondamentale en face de Dieu*', and from it springs as its perfect expression, the virtue of humility.

'God is much more perfectly adored by the prostration of the mind than by bodily prostration'. (*In Boeth*: 3, 2.) 'I am who AM; thou art she who is not', as our Lord said to St Catherine. Thus humility, which may be described as the recognition by the intellect, and the acceptance by the will, in all its implications, of the position of the creature in the face of the Creator, plays a profound part in the religion and religious praise of every rational creature. '*Manus tuas Domine, fecerunt me et plasmaverunt me totum in circuitu*'. (Job 10, 8).

'What hast thou that thou hast not received?' (1 Cor. 4, 7).

'I believe in God, Creator of all things visible and invisible'.

'I am Who am'.

But God is not only the Creator, but the preserver of the universe. 'The cause of being and of the continuation of being are one and the same. But the knowledge and the will of God are the cause of being in all things. Therefore they also conserve all things in being. Whence it is written, "Upholding all things by the Word of his power"'. (*Contra Gent.* 3, 55).

'He spoke and they were made'; but the Word whereby he spoke and whereby they were made, is that Eternal Word which proceeds eternally from the Father, in whom there is no shadow of change or alteration. God is Pure Act, wherefore the Creative and the Conserving Word are both the single act and cause of being.

In addition to Creator and Preserver in being, God is also the author of man's redemption. 'Who for our sakes and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was made man'.

'God so loved the world as to send his only begotten Son that they that believe in him may not perish but may have life everlasting'. (Jn. 3, 16). 'I am he that blots out thine iniquities for mine own sake'. (Isaias 43, 25). 'It is proper to Christ as man to be the redeemer immediately; although the redemption may be ascribed to the whole Trinity as its first Cause'. (*III* 48, 5).

Thus the creature, recognising that it has nothing either in nature or in grace which does not come from God, realising that he is all and

he is nothing, instinctively prostrates himself before him, 'bearing witness to his excellence and to man's total subjection to him' (II-II 81, 3 ad 2).

'*Venite adoremus et procidamus ante Deum qui fecit nos*'. (Ps. 94, 6). So does the Church, at the very beginning of the Office of each day, summon us to adore God, pointing out how it is to be done, *et procidamus ante Deum*; and, moreover, adding the motive—*Deum qui fecit nos quia ipse est Dominus Deus noster*. This adoration must be principally internal, but accompanied even by bodily gestures. 'Thus when we genuflect we signify our weakness in comparison with God, and when we prostrate ourselves we profess that we are nothing of ourselves'. (Ibid. 84, 2 ad 2).

Nor does it stop at bodily gestures, at reverence of the person only. The creature, recognising that not only what he is but also what he has comes from God—'What hast thou that thou hast not received?'—seeks to return that, too, to his Maker—he offers sacrifice. 'Sacrifice is the offering to God of certain sensible things in sign of the subjection and honour due to him' (Ibid. 85, 1), but 'the exterior sacrifice is only representative of the interior and true sacrifice, whereby the human mind offers itself to God'. (*Contra Gent.* 3, 99).

*Sacrificium Deo spiritus contribulatus; cor contritum et humilitum Deus non despiciet*. (Ps. 50, 11). 'So, too, a vow is the directing of a thing to the worship or service of God'. (II-II 85, 5).

The humble soul which knows God and therefore knows itself, is unable to find adequate expression for the spirit of adoration which possesses it. Prostration, self-sacrifice, vows, all are inadequate. Only one Creature has ever succeeded in giving adequate expression to its adoration, the God-man who by giving up all that he was, offered to God the most perfect and precious thing the world ever had seen or could see or possess—the life of God Incarnate. As God he was himself the object of the worship and adoration of the whole of creation; but as man he led that creation in its liturgy by a ceaseless homage of intense adoration which commenced at the first moment of his conception and continued uninterruptedly until it reached its consummation in his final surrender into his Father's hands of all he was and had received from him.

*Ecce Venio*. 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me'. (Jn. 4, 34). 'Not my will but thine be done'. 'Father, it is consummated. Into thy hands I commend my spirit'. (Jn. 19,30; Lk. 23, 46).

The fundamental attitude of the soul of Christ was a spirit of profound adoration having expression in sacrifice. He, with the knowledge of both God and man, realised the full implications of 'the two abysses'. 'I am who am—thou art she who is not'. Even as God it

could with all reverence be said to him, 'What hast thou that thou hast not received?' (1 Cor. 4, 7), since it is his Personal attribute within the Trinity to proceed, to receive his being from the Father—eternally, it is true, and without any inequality, but nevertheless to receive. Thus while his adoration remained a human act, for God cannot adore himself—adoration and religion imply subjection—it was still the act of the Person of the Word and therefore of infinite value. Beginning with the Annunciation, reaching its consummation and most perfect expression on Calvary, it continues in the glorified life—in heaven, in the Holy Eucharist, in our souls when he has visited us in his Sacramental Presence, and in the *sacrificium laudis*, the Mass.

But 'Christ's works are referred to himself and to his members in the same way as the works of any other man in a state of grace are referred to himself; as the whole Church, Christ's Mystical Body is reckoned as one person with its head, which is Christ' (III 48, 1). Consequently it is not surprising to find that the homage of adoration, due to God from the whole of Creation simply because it is his creation—*Omnis terra adoret te, Deus*—is especially required from those who are the chosen friends of God, in whom Christ lives, who are 'other Christs'.

'It is written', said our Lord, presumably quoting from Deuteronomy, 'the Lord thy God thou shalt adore'. (Mt. 4, 10). 'Adore God', commanded the angel in the Apocalypse (22, 9); 'Adore the Lord, all ye his holy ones', sang the Psalmist, 'adore him in his holy temple'. 'Come let us adore the Lord our God who made us'. (Ps. 95, 9; 94, 6). 'Adore ye him that made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water'. (Apoc. 14, 7). 'Adore the Lord all ye his angels'. (Ps. 96, 7).

And the holy ones of the Lord have always given him the service of their adoration. 'Abraham', we read in the Breviary, '*tres vidit et unum adoravit*'. The children of Israel, we are told on more than one occasion, falling down with their faces to the ground, 'adored and praised the Lord'. (2 Paral. 7, 3). When God became man and dwelt among us almost his first visitors were those three kings who, fulfilling the prophecy of the Psalmist that 'all the kings of the earth shall adore him', 'falling down adored him', seeing under the visible form of the tiny Babe the invisible Creator of all things visible and invisible.

So does all the earth adore the Lord. But when St John the Seer was vouchsafed his vision of the heavenly Jerusalem he seems to have been specially struck by the liturgy which he describes, metaphorically, of course, in great detail: 'The four and twenty ancients *fell down* before him that sitteth on the throne and *adored* him that liveth forever and ever, and *cast their crowns* before the throne saying:

“Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honour and power. Because thou hast *created* all things; and for thy will they were and have been created” (Apoc. 4, 10.) Here we have all the elements of the adoration described by the Psalmist to which the Church summons us at the beginning of each day’s Office. Adoration, prostration, self-offering before the Lord whom they worship as the Creator of all things. They cast their crowns before him, viz., their most precious adornment, their glory. But in the Hebrew *gloria mea* as rendered in the Psalms signifies ‘the soul’—*Exsurge gloria mea* (Ps. 107, 3). Thus the heavenly worshippers cast their souls, their very beings before their God, surrender themselves completely to him; just as on earth the chosen soul annihilates herself before her Lord by the three vows and especially by the vow of obedience whereby she offers the worship of her most precious and intimate possession—the will. ‘In a special way those are religious, i.e., directed to God, who consecrate their whole life to the divine worship. . . . It is clear that to take a vow is properly an act of latria or religion’. (II-II 88, 5.)

Every act of obedience is an act of self-sacrifice in the fullest sense, an act of adoration in union with him who on Calvary cast before his Father the crown of his human life, and in union with those four and twenty ancients who in the heavenly Jerusalem ‘cast their crowns before the throne’.

Not only is the Lord adored as Creator, but also as Governor of the Universe. . . . ‘I saw them that had overcome the beast and his image . . . having the harps of God and singing the Canticle of Moses the servant of God and the Canticle of the Lamb, saying: “Great and wonderful are thy works, O Lord God almighty, just and true are thy ways, O King of Ages . . . all nations shall come and adore in thy sight, because thy judgments are manifest . . . for just and true are his judgments. Thou hast taken to thee great power, thou hast reigned’ (Apoc. 15 and 11). And not only Creation and Government, but also Redemption are singled out as motives for adoration. ‘When he had opened the book, the four and twenty ancients fell down before the Lamb . . . and they sang a new Canticle, saying: ‘Thou art worthy, O Lord, to take the book and open the seals thereof, because thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God. . . . The Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power and divinity . . . glory and benediction . . .’ (Ibid. 5, 8-12).

Thus does the whole of creation fulfil its duty of religion, worshipping the God who made it, preserves and redeems it, worshipping him with an adoration which expresses itself in the sacrifice of all it has received and which is offered in heaven and on earth, by and in and with him who, having received all that a creature could receive from

God in the hypostatic union, gave back to his Father all that a creature who was also God could give. The acts of the Head are those of the members, and those of the members equally belong to the Head. In him all that the love of the Trinity has created returns whence it came by the same way of love.

And yet there is more. 'Religion worships God by bearing witness to the excellence of God and to the subjection of the creature', (*In Boeth*, 3, 2) and although we do find the Israelites praising the Lord 'because he is good', (Ps. 135), yet the goodness in mind is chiefly that towards men: it is what God does, the excellence of his works with which religion as such is chiefly concerned, and with the subjection due to him from those works. Only a creature can offer the worship of subjection and sacrifice, but there is one who can bear witness even more adequately to the divine excellence—God himself. All adoration contains an element of praise, and it may contain a great deal, but the perfect praise of God is God himself: 'Thy praise is thy very self, o Lord', says St Augustine. And it is the praise of what he is, which would not have been the least whit diminished had no creature ever existed, had the divine operation terminated in the *ad intra* processions of the blessed Trinity. 'The Holy Trinity is the temple, wherein by his eternal generation the Word is the perfect praise of the Father, the brightness of his glory and the Image of his substance'.<sup>1</sup> He is *le cantique que Dieu se chante intérieurement, le cantique qui jaillit des profondeurs de la divinité, le cantique vivant dans lequel Dieu se complait éternellement, parcequ'il est 'l'expression infinie de ses perfections'*.<sup>2</sup>

We read in Ecclesiasticus: *Deus est major omni laude* (43, 33), wherefore the Psalmist declares, *Tibi silentium laus*. The divine essence is ineffable, inexpressible, to all save God; he expresses it once in that eternal Word, which is none the less uttered in silence—the silence of eternity, of infinity.

'The Father uttered one Word, and that Word is his Son; he uttered him in eternal silence' (St John of the Cross.)

Had the Word of God remained in the bosom of the Father, this praise would have been heard by the Father alone; but the Word was made flesh, he clothed himself with our flesh as a word is clothed with sound, and so was manifest to men and was known by them. Henceforward the works of God were the works of man and man thus raised by grace could himself do the works of God. The praise of God

<sup>1</sup> Dom Delatte, *Commentary on the Rule of St Benedict*, c.8.

<sup>2</sup> Dom Marmion, *Christ l'Idéal du Moine*, c.14.

for himself, in himself, by himself, now could be the praise of man for his God—*Laus mea tu es* (Jeremias 17, 14).

Man could now adore God, not only for what he did, but for what he was; he could prostrate himself now, not only before the God who made him, but before the God eternal and infinite in perfection, the Beginning and the End, the Triune God. Now *l'âme contemple Dieu, en lui-même, dans l'excellence créée de son essence et de ses Personnes. Elle oublie tout devant la gloire de Dieu. L'adoration, c'est l'extase d'amour écrasé par la beauté, la force, la grandeur immense de l'objet aimé*'. (Sr Elizabeth of the Trinity.)

*Adorate Dominum quiniqm sanctus est* (Ps. 98).

*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth*, cried the seraphim of Isaías' vision (6, 3).

'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, who was, who is, and who is to come', sang the four living creatures who in their praise 'rested not day or night', while the mysterious four and twenty ancients, here as always, 'fell down before him that sitteth on the throne and adored him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast down their crowns before the throne'. (Apoc. 4).

*Quis ut Deus*, cried St Michael in an ecstasy of wondering adoration. *Adoro te devote, latens Deitas. . . Tibi se cor meum totum sub-jicit. Quia te contemplans totum deficit* sang St Thomas inspired by a similar sentiment.

Such, surely, are the 'true adorers', such as the Father seeketh to adore him, they are those who adore in Spirit and in Truth.

They adore in Truth since they adore *Per Ipsum et cum Ipso et in Ipso, per quem majestatem tuam laudant angeli, adorant Dominationes, tremunt potestates, cæli cælorumque Virtutes ac beata Sera-phim, socia exsultatione, concelebrant. Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus*.

And he is the Praise, the Word of the Father, and he declares 'Thy Word is truth. Abide in me . . . no one cometh to the Father but by me. . . I have glorified thee on earth, o Father, and the glory which thou has given me, I have given them' (John 17, 22).

They adore in the Spirit, firstly because the Holy Spirit is the Unity, the kiss, the embrace of all that is common to Father and Son in the Unity of Truth and Truth of Unity, and because by their adoration they enter as it were and associate themselves with the intimate life of the Trinity; and secondly, because it is under the influence of the Holy Spirit, working through the gift of piety in its most perfect form, that they are enabled to praise God for what he is, to sing with the Church in the *Gloria: Adoramus te propter magnam gloriam tuam*.

*Pietas*, says St Thomas, *que est donum accipit in hoc aliquid divinum pro mensura, ut scilicet Deo honorem impendat, non quia sit ei debitus, sed quia Deus honore dignus est, per quem modum ipse Deus sibi honori est.* (Sent. IV, 34, 3, 2) and John of St Thomas, commenting on the above passage, remarks:

*At vero, donum pietatis relicta hac mensura retributionis et largitionis bonorum, honorat et magnificat Dominum ratione sui . . . solum attendit ad magnitudinem divinam in se.* (q. 70. Disp. 18, 6, 1.)

*Adoramus Te . . . propter magnam gloriam tuam—Tu solus sanctus, Tu solus Dominus, Tu solus Altissimus—Pater—Filius—Spiritus Sanctus—Increatus—Immensus—Aeternus—Omnipotens—Deus—Dominus—Ut in confessione vera sempiternæque Deitatis, et in personis proprietas, et in essentia unitas, et in majestate adoretur aequalitas. . . . Adoremus Te per Ipsum et cum Ipso et in Ipso . . . per quem est tibi Deo Patri in Unitate Spiritus Sancti omnis honor et gloria per omnia sæcula sæculorum—*

*Sit nomen Domini benedictum—*

*Sanctificetur nomen Tuum.*

'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who is, who was, and who is to come'.

'Benediction and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving, honour and power and strength to our God for ever and ever. Amen'. (Apoc. 4 and 7).

'Blessed art thou, O Lord the God of our Fathers, and worthy to be praised and glorified and exalted above all for ever: and blessed is the holy name of thy glory . . .

'Blessed art thou in the holy temple of thy glory . . .

'Blessed art thou on the throne of thy Kingdom . . .

'Blessed art thou that beholdest the depths and sitteth upon the cherubim . . .

'Blessed art thou in the firmament of heaven, and worthy of praise and glorious for ever'. (Daniel 3, 52-56).

'The Lord is great and exceeding to be praised . . . praise and magnificence are before him . . . give to the Lord glory to his name; bring up sacrifices and come ye in his sight, and adore the Lord in holy becomingness. . . . Save us, O God our Saviour, that we may give glory to thy holy name, and may rejoice in singing thy praise (1 Par. 16) . . . who hast predestined us unto the praise of the glory of [thy] grace, in which [thou] hast graced us in the Beloved Son, through whom and with whom and in whom we adore thee—on account of thy great glory; for by him and in him and with him is all honour and glory to thee, o Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen'. (Eph. 1, 5-6).

## ACTIVE PURIFICATION

(The *Ancren Riwe* Parts 2 and 3)

BY

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.



NATURAL division in the purgative way arises from the two types of purification which the soul must undergo before it is ready for its second conversion and entry into illumination. These are first the active and then the passive purifications. The beginner on entry into the way of perfection has the relics of past sin hanging about him like so many rags and pieces of knotted cord. He has to struggle to shake himself free of this foul heritage. The ascetic moral virtues must be brought particularly into play. He must burn away the dross from his senses and his emotions. He must practise, above all, temperance and justice—the caustic virtues that will cleanse him thoroughly if he fears no personal suffering. It is precisely here that a rule plays its first part. The soul needs guidance and also, the virtue of obedience, which lies at the root of all sacrifice and of every moral virtue insofar as the virtuous actions are performed, because they are known as God's will. After this active following of a rule and its ascetic influence, God himself begins to apply the knife to the diseases which pass unnoticed in the general bustle of the active life. The soul passes through the night of the senses, God purifying those external contacts with material things, ready for the new lights of the illuminative way.

The second part of the *Riwe* is concerned with *Keeping the Heart*, that is the active expulsion of all its enemies. But the very first step in this life after conversion must be the *Nosce Teipsum*, the knowing of one's self so as to see the evils that have to be expelled. Now this knowledge of self may be derived entirely from the rule or law, entirely from outside. This is the only criterion for retarded souls, not desirous of making progress but contenting themselves with keeping for the most part out of serious sin and for the rest enjoying the material pleasures of life. For such as these the list of an examination of conscience is necessary. They read out the law or its infringements—Have I done this or omitted that which I see written down in the law?—a frequent method of examination in these modern days of tepidity, and one which we might anticipate in a rule of life. But this is one of the valuable lessons a medieval rule has to teach us today. In modern times all 'examens', particular or general,

tend to concentrate on the sin, the fault or failing. But such an exclusive view of what has been done or omitted leaves aside any true criterion for judging these things *as evil*. It is useless for me to recognise that I have been vain unless I can see vanity as an evil thing, as displeasing to God. I must be able to see these sins as obstacles to my reaching God, and in order to see that I must see God, too. A hedge appears to the donkey as a pleasant, if forbidden, eating place with its many luscious green fronds; but to the hunter looking to the chase beyond it is a hurdle to be jumped. The *Riwle* does not leave the soul to look dolefully at sins. The sisters are to examine their conscience last thing at night; but they examine the whole of their conscience, taking the good with the bad. They are contrite and grateful (p. 36). If when you turn in upon yourself you follow the teaching of the Victorines and contemplate the image of God in your soul, you will see at once where that image is clear and where it is smirched. With that objective standard an 'examen', however particular, need never be self-centred, but continue always to be God-centred.

Therefore the author of the *Riwle* insists that his recluses should be introspective, but with this objective bias which brings a perfect balance and prevents any morbid self-analysis. They are to be outwardly blind, shunning all external events; this will allow God to give an inward light to see him and know him. From this comes love of him and despising of the world which shows the wiles of the devil and of their personal sins. When they begin to consider these sins they should think sometimes of hell which they have deserved, but also of heaven with our Lady and her maidens and our Lord above all, the crown of them all. It is dangerous to look at sin and hell without turning quickly to their opposite and dwelling upon grace and heaven in order to kindle desires for these (pp. 69-70, et seqq). In this way he avoids the evil type of introspection which leads only to scruples and does not in fact proceed beyond the purely extrinsic measuring of self against external laws. This objective seeking for God in the soul will develop a sensitive conscience which senses sin from its very evilness. For ultimately the rule of the heart rules all things and of itself rules out all evil.

Having begun on the way of self-knowledge the soul sets to work to cleanse away the evil that it sees by this knowledge. The life of the beginner is called the Purgative Way because this cleansing is the main feature of the whole period. That is why the Cross must play such a large part in this period. As the soul grows and develops in the bracing light of grace, the Cross becomes a source of a new sort of joy; the Cross never leaves the traveller in the vale of tears

no matter how noble he has grown. The lives of the saints disclose this love of the wounded Christ. But at first the devotion is hard and burdensome, at least at times. The anchoress may be as a bird flying straight to her maker, but a bird's wings are spread in the form of a cross:

The true anchoresses, whom we compare to birds—yet not we but God—spread their wings and make a cross of themselves, as a bird doth when it flieth; that is, in the thoughts of the heart, and the mortification of the flesh, they bear the Lord's cross (pp. 99-100).

And in their prayers these good women are given what may be called the Little Office of the Cross, or, as we have suggested, an early form of the Stations of the Cross. They must at midday 'think upon God's rood as much and as intently' as ever they can, with the five salutations already performed in the morning before Mass. They genuflect, inscribe a cross on the ground, repeat ejaculatory prayers which are still current and familiar; they stand up and recite psalms and repeat other antiphonal ejaculations. Part at least of all this is obligatory on the beginner; the author concludes the description of these 'Stations', 'Whoso cannot say these five prayers, should say always one; and whoso thinketh them too long may omit the Psalms' (pp. 27-30). And the recluse finally resigns herself to sleep with the following beautifully expressive devotion:

And finally say: 'Christ conquers: + Christ reigns + Christ rules + ' and with three crosses, with the thumb up above the forehead; and then, 'Behold the Lord's cross + Begone, ye adversaries; the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David hath conquered. Halleluia'. A large cross, as at 'Make haste, O God to help me', with 'Behold the Lord's cross + ' and then four crosses, on four sides, with these four afterclauses, 'The cross + drives away every evil. + The cross is the restorer of the world. By the sign of this cross + let everything malignant fly away; and by the same sign + let everything that is kind and good be preserved' (pp. 36-37).

So ends the recluse's day, almost literally with the cross stamped upon her very body. Her apartment never allowed her to escape from its remembrance, and as she lay down to rest she may have often glanced at the great black curtain of the grill which cut her off entirely from the world, for upon the curtain was worked a large white cross, reminding her of the pains of her way of purity. The author sums up the whole character of this mark of her life when, speaking of this white cross, he says: 'Pain is always to be understood by the cross' (p. 40). The purgative way is a way of pain.

Towards the end of the *Rule*, the anchoress is shown a glimpse

of a new attitude to this, when the constant pain of their life, a veritable martyrdom, is shown to be a source of joy and gladness. Taking his theme from the 'Sentences of St Bernard', he suggests the three ways of the spiritual life with voluntary crucifixion as the highest. But he says on this occasion: 'I will begin from a higher point' (pp. 263-264, p. 267). The beginner must be content to believe that the cross will itself bring this joy and refreshment, but at first he must be ready to endure and to endure actively, voluntarily. He must begin by crucifying his outward senses that are so full of self-seeking passion, those five senses which are 'the wardens of the heart'. 'The heart is a full wild animal, and makes many wild leaps' (p. 39). So in order to keep the heart, these five senses have to be actively purified, an activity which St John of the Cross has described with such precision in terms of the Night of the Senses. St John, in fact, divides this night into two, the one active, the other passive. For him, standing on his great mystical eminence, the really profound night of the senses is the passive one in which God himself cleanses these five wits, so that he treats the active more briefly and with less detailed analysis (cf. *Ascent of Mount Carmel* I, 13). This would account for the great contrast between *The Ascent*, in which the author is concerned with spiritual or even intellectual gluttony, curiosity, luxury and the like, and the *Riwle* with its cruder treatment of the sins of sense. The *Riwle* deals in detail with the earlier and active stage, when the senses are still filled with the grosser elements picked up in this world.

In modern times the danger of the sort of ascetical exercises inculcated in the robust ages of faith, lies in the embarrassment and self-consciousness with which they are likely to be put into practice. With regard, for example, to *sight*, which is the first of the senses to be treated in the *Riwle*, the ruling of which has been called 'the custody of the eyes', a novice will soon find himself ham-strung by the self-consciousness of knowing that he must not look about him. He may find that, having shut out 'worldly sights', he can see only himself; he becomes preoccupied with the possible effect it may have on others; will they know that he is refraining from looking at things that interest him? He grows more conscious of the thoughts in his head, of the very movements of his body. Not so the medieval anchoress. Much was naturally expected of her in her cabin next the church, so that she was asked to keep a very close guard upon her eyes. She had the big curtain to help her in this. She is to refrain even from looking out of the windows, which sound somewhat unhygienically sealed: 'See that your parlour windows be always fast on every side, and likewise well shut' (p. 41).

The principle supporting this extreme mortification in the anchorite cell is applicable to every Christian life, for the eye is the first entrance to the soul, and sins of all sorts force their first entry through these windows. The *Rivle* shows how the first sin of Lucifer and the original sin of Eve began in this way: 'Lucifer, because he saw and beheld his own beauty, fell into pride, and of an angel became a foul fiend' (p. 42). The pride of life and the gross sins of the flesh begin by simple glances which stir the imagination and the passions, so that all the senses both internal and external are involved. 'Thus, often, as is said, "of little waxeth mickle".' The author is most concerned about the chastity of those who follow this eremitical life (his figures and examples are compelling without ever becoming morbid), for the passions, pent up by so much seclusion, may rush forth on the slightest provocation. Thus sights, which would be harmless enough for a man in the world, might become the occasion of some sin of unchastity in a religious. The difficulty is for the religious to remain balanced and objective and to avoid morbidity. The wrong sort of custody of the eyes may lead some to become conscious of the difference of sex as soon as they see anyone, the imagination being stirred and the conscience disturbed. The balance can only be achieved when mortification of the eye is treated, not as exclusively a matter concerned with sex, but as a general form of mortification, particularly in restraining the wanton curiosity which fills so many without their being conscious of it.

In this way the practice of guarding the eye applies to all beginners in whatever state in life. In church at prayer the need is sufficiently recognised, so that staring about the building at other worshippers is universally understood as a distraction by anyone who has begun to follow Christ. But to a certain extent this habit must be applied in daily life outside church, if the soul is to remain recollected. There is so much happening in the modern world of speed and invention that it is easy for the eye to become preoccupied with 'sights' and 'sight-seeing'—one of the most distracting and unspiritual activities for the leisure of present day men and women. Such things have to be avoided when possible. And there are other evils attached to seeing, which are akin to those of the anchoress; the temptation, for example, of the front window of a house on the street. Many such 'pedestrian' forms of mortification of sight may be found without becoming a fanatically morbid recluse.

The more recluses look outward, they have less love of our Lord inwardly. . . . Wherefore, my dear sisters, be outwardly blind, as was the holy Isaac and the good Tobias; and God will give you,

as he gave them, inward light to see him and know him; and, through this knowledge, to love him above all things (pp. 69-70). The sense of hearing requires mortifying with as much vigour as that of sight, particularly in its active form of speech. Again, the anchoress would require special and far more stringent instructions on the custody of the tongue, and yet the principle involved is the same for the ordinary Christian as for her, and the *Riwe's* instructions for the most part are applicable to all beginners. There is need for all to be prepared before they speak, to say if possible some brief prayer asking for the grace of truth, to restrain the impulse to convey news in order to astonish or interest and so obtain an unwholesome glory among the audience. The delightful simile of the hen (p. 52) brings out clearly the need for restraint. It is so easy to fall into the sins of speech, once the tongue has been loosed. Not only are the evil events and deeds tempting food for the tongue; it is often even the good things which befall a person that he is most anxious to tell. That is the point of the hen who cackles when she has laid an egg, or the pedlar who shouts about his wares. The tongue betrays one, not only into uncharitable and unjust remarks about others, but also into vain-glory about one's self. Our Lady was silent when the good news was broken to her; she kept the marvellous events and words in her heart.

The urge of vanity tempts the beginner to speak about any spiritual gifts he may have received. Often this is hidden and unknown to the man himself; he may be enthusiastic to speak of divine things, but even such an enthusiasm may clothe a desire to show forth his wares, to reveal his views on the spiritual life, to let others know that he has indeed progressed in his vision of the way of perfection. This spiritual garrulousness may take on another form in the zealous beginner. He may find himself falling into a habit of delivering exhortations. Perhaps he feels it required of him to insist on his own views on spiritual matters. Such zeal needs to be analysed, for it may easily flow from a subtle form of exhibitionism. Above all the beginner must avoid the habit of preaching in his prayers, rehearsing what he would like to say about certain truths he has begun ever so little to understand. This is indeed a grave obstacle to progress and one which belongs to the devout rather than to the worldly men and women of garrulous temperament. The cackle of the devout 'hen' is almost more tiresome than that of the worldly, and being outwardly about holy things it creates a more serious, because less obvious, barrier to progress.

Nor are you to preach to any man. . . . Many keep in their words to let more out, as men do water at the milldam. . . . But, when

you must needs speak a little, raise the floodgates of your mouth as men do at the mill, and let them down quickly (pp. 55-56).

There is much in this section of the *Riwle* which is applicable to the life of any beginner today. But the most important remarks come toward the end, where the author links up this mortification of the tongue with the theological virtue of hope and therefore with prayer, for the two are interlocked (pp. 60-61). But this belongs rather to the positive benefits of silence, to which he devotes a section of the next part.

Mortification of the ear is closely connected with that of the tongue, and, in fact, might seem to amount to the same thing. But a progress is in fact marked in dividing these two aspects of silence. Thus the first duty of a man in setting forth in quest of the supernatural life of grace is to refrain from the sins that arise from his own talk, backbiting, boasting, swearing, elaborating the truth, or repeating stories the entertainment value of which depends more on indecency than wit. But having placed the iron of the bit in his mouth so that he may be easily reined in by the hand, there remains the difficulty of hearing what others have to say in the same unpleasant strains. It often provides a real difficulty for those who have to work among others. In a factory how are they to remain aloof, untouched by the sea of unhappy talk which surrounds them? The *Riwle* states the law simply:

Against all evil speech stop your ears, and have a loathing of the mouth that vomiteth out poison. Evil speech is threefold—poisonous, foul, idle: idle speech is evil; foul speech is worse; poisonous speech is the worst (p. 62).

But how to stop one's ears? How, for example, to stop the ears against the poisonous speech of heresy, of which in those saner days the author could write: 'Heresy, God be thanked, prevaieth not in England' (p. 63). It prevails now throughout most countries of the world and provides the greatest and yet the least heeded danger to the ear, and from the ear to the soul. A man who has set out on the way and learnt to hold his tongue is often the more easily persuaded by the high words of an apparent authority, by attractive or romantic pictures of spiritual things, by novelties in doctrine. How is he to distinguish? How is the ear to be stopped against the heresy of false mysticism, which has such a hold on some modern dabblers in psychology or the occult? The great gift of discernment of spirits, to which St Catherine of Siena devotes a whole section of her *Dialogue*, is required here under the light of the Holy Spirit. But for the beginner the gifts are still held down by many imperfections, and his only guide will be a firm grasp on tradition, refraining himself from

novelty. That in itself is a very deep mortification, for many new and fresh expositions of Catholic doctrine are good in themselves; but before he can discern, the beginner must submit to the authority of the Church in all things and not allow himself to be led beyond it into the confines where doctrine is developing under the stimulus of modern problems and discoveries.

The *Rivule* is more concerned with the dangers of flattery which flies into the ear and so easily carries off the soul captive. The first type of flatterer, 'if a man is good, praiseth him in his presence, and without scruple, maketh him still better than he is' (p. 65). This is a serious obstacle to one who has turned from evil and set out on the road to God. Frequently flattery will make a beginner self-conscious. He tries to deny what is said, but feels that perhaps there is some truth in it, and so his denials are half-hearted and unconvinced. He begins to see an importance in his actions and habits of life, to discover differences between his mode of living and that of his neighbours, putting himself above them because he is striving for higher things. It has often happened that the unwise word of a flatterer has produced a serious setback in the progress of a soul, lasting many years, or even inflicting a permanent injury. The ear must be stopped against this. Such words are not to be analysed, or considered in any way, to see in what they may be true and in what they exaggerate. Once they are let in on any pretext they will begin to poison the system. It may be difficult neither to listen to, nor to take account of, such words, but the surest way for a man to deafen his ears to such sounds is by truth, the truth of his own standing in relation to God, which if he knows it will prove an impenetrable partition between himself and the utterer. True self-knowledge stops the ears to all such sounds.

Active purification and mortification of these three 'senses', seeing, speaking and hearing, lead to the opening of the spiritual eyes and ears. With the successful overcoming of these subordinate members, the soul receives the first suggestions of the movement of the Holy Spirit, in particular the gift of understanding, a 'swiftness and clearness of sight' (p. 71), for the eye of the soul is thus cleared by mortification and prepared for the heavenly vision of God's mysteries after death. But this development of the gifts belongs more properly to a later stage in the growth of the soul.

The most radical of all the outward senses, upon which the others are built, is that of touch or feeling. 'This one sense is in all the other senses, and throughout the whole body, and therefore needs to be the better guarded' (p. 83). Consequently the beginner needs to bring his whole body under subjection by active mortification of the

flesh, lest he be led by small infidelities of a sensuous kind to the greater sins of luxury which take such a firm hold of the body and so completely blind the soul. Sentimentality, a love of ease and comfort, a delicacy regarding clothes, 'luxuriating' in warmth, fondling pets—there are a thousand ways, all apparently distant from the sins of the sixth commandment, and yet these things may be the first steps towards graver evil owing to the all pervasive nature of the sense of touch. That is why the purgative way will be a way symbolised by hairshirts and disciplines, fasts and abstinence. The body treated with a certain rigour and harshness develops well and becomes by degrees responsive to the movement of the soul without its health being impaired.

But the *Rivle*, happily enough after being elsewhere outspoken on the crudest sins, here only touches on the sordid side of sensuality, and takes us at once to the foot of the Cross, where alone we can learn to see the mortification of the flesh in true perspective. Christ's body, torn and bleeding, remains the model to draw the senses from sensuality. Christ's hands are the most perfect subjects of the sense of touch, and 'God's hands were nailed to the Cross' (p. 87). Those hands whose touch cured the sick and dying, those hands whose power broke the loaves to feed the five thousands, those hands which turned bread into the same body of which they were members; the creative hands of Christ have all power; they sustain, they make and they hold together what they make, they embrace every man with utter affection, they tenderly caress the beginner on the journey to heaven—but they are pierced, and through those fissures they support on the cross the whole body. The hands that are mortified are the chaste hands of the stigmata.

This asceticism of the hands, which can play so powerful a part in the first upward movement of many a young Christian today, working in factory or farm, stands for the suffering in all the body and in all the senses which our Lord completed to the fullest possible degree on Calvary, suffering in sight in seeing the tears of his Mother . . . in smell from the foul place on which he was crucified . . . ears and mouth struck by the insensate soldiers . . . gall on his tongue . . . (pp. 80-81). All this is an example to the beginner of the hard life of the Cross, the only instrument which will give him the mastery of his senses. But more important for the generous beginner is the author's insistence on the interior feelings of Christ, the suffering of his inward sensibility. Three spears smote him to the heart—the weeping of his Mother and the other Maries, the betrayal and flight of his own disciples, the evil of those who crucified him (pp. 83 sq. All this section on the sufferings of Christ, which

were the most painful and the most complete of any human suffering, should be compared with St Thomas's treatment of the same subject—III, 46, vi—to which they bear a striking similarity).

It is therefore of special importance that the beginner should mortify the interior feelings he is tempted to indulge at the beginning. Outside Catholicism today the one great test of prayer and devotion is 'religious experience'; if a man does not 'experience' or feel a response to his prayer or meditation, he regards himself as out of touch with God. In truth, it should be the opposite, for at the beginning the soul is often seeking its own pleasure and satisfaction in these experiences. It asks to feel inwardly the sweetness of God's presence, of the beauty of his teaching, the unity of all in him. But such feelings are entirely accidental to the reality of communion with God and easily begin to be sought for their own sake. It is therefore necessary to follow our Lord in the mortification of the interior senses. The soul must not hanker after the feeling of sorrow for sin or of the love of God. Such feelings must be pierced by the nails of suffering and aridity. God himself usually arranges periods of aridity to wean the soul from such attachments, and in that case the mortifications belong rather to the passive purification, the dark night of the senses. But there are ways of mortifying these interior feelings, particularly by means of the most vital and indocile of all the interior senses, namely, that of the imagination. The mortification of this fundamental sense, however, must continue through the illuminative way, for it is there that it is most likely to become a stumbling block. We will therefore leave the treatment of this subject to the next stage of the spiritual life.

We might expect to find under the heading of the active purification of the senses, some references to voluntary physical mortifications. Many at this stage in their life are prone to seek their salvation almost exclusively in disciplines, hair-shirts, fasts and vigils which they choose with personal preference and the exercise of self-will. Their good will and genuine desire for perfection are manifest, but they seek a short cut through external and physical actions. They are in fact tempted to a form of pharisaism; they rely on self-made laws which develop sometimes into very real hindrances to further growth. Life becomes tied up in a severe and loveless legalism, and perfection is measured by physical pain and inconvenience.

The *Ancren Riwe* is a hard rule of itself, and the woman who had taken it upon herself had in fact entered upon a way of great austerity and mortification. But apart from that one act of choice in accepting all the laws, no encouragement is given to seek further

forms of penance. In the last section the author lays down certain rules of conduct which amount to a very severe discipline—two meals only a day between Easter and Holyrood (14th September), one meal for the rest of the year, perpetual abstinence except at times of great sickness, coarse garments and coarse works. But although these are taken on under obedience and are therefore salutary, the author sets very little store by them because they are external:

I said before, at the commencement, that ye ought not, like unwise people, to promise to keep any of the external rules. I say the same still; nor do I write them for any but you alone. I say this in order that other anchoresses may not say that I, by my own authority, make new rules for them. Nor do I command that they observe them, and ye may even change them, whenever ye will, for better ones. In regard to things of this kind that have been in use before, it matters little (p. 312).

He is therefore acting as director rather than legislator and these specifications of an austere life are offered in particular to the three sisters and not in general to all anchoresses. But even so they must not go beyond them without special permission. 'Fast no day upon bread and water, except ye have leave' (p. 314). 'Wear no iron nor haircloth, nor hedgehog-skins; and do not beat yourselves therewith . . . without leave of your confessor' (p. 317-318). In this way their lives are directed so that self-will finds no secret outlet in apparent austerity or in externals which may be empty of the spirit. It would be more advisable to avoid all extra penances at this period of life apart from the ones agreed to by the director as fitting to a normal and generous Christian seeking to amend his ways and to reach more perfect heights of virtue. Obedience to God's will in daily trials and difficulties must be the predominant form of penance and austerity, and that can be encouraged by a strenuous following of an austere way of life, mortifying the senses and submitting to the direction of another. But voluntary mortification beyond these confines should be ignored, except under some very particular inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

## MY LORD AND MY GOD

BY

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Y LORD AND MY GOD: this is the summing up by St Thomas the doubter after he had seen the Christ risen from the dead. It is the challenge every man since has had to face: is Christ God?

The following is not going to be an exhaustive analysis of the evidence, nor is it to be written in an apologetic spirit. My aim is to state the position as I see it.

The Catholic Church today holds as its basic object of belief the fact that Christ is God. The Protestants wobble, some do believe, some do not. The Eastern Churches, until their contact with modernism, held the Catholic faith. It was this fact—that Christ is God and Man—that was worked out in the first six councils of the Church between the 4th and 6th centuries.

*Nicaea*: 'We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only begotten, that is of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made. . . .'

And the Definition of *Chalcedon*: 'Therefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer (*Theotokos* Mother of God); one and the same Christ Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognised in two Natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation. . . .'

There is then no doubt as to the attitude on this point of that early Church which Harnack, as well as we, would call the Catholic Church.

The early pagan writers, though they are vague enough about the Christian tenets, seem to be aware of this: that the Christians worship Christ as God.

*Pliny*: 'They (the Christians) declared that the sum of their guilt or error had amounted only to this, that on an appointed day they

had been accustomed to meet before daybreak and to recite a hymn in alternate choirs to Christ, as to a god'.

The Apostles themselves were unanimous in their writings that Christ was God, beginning with Thessalonians and ending with the Gospel of St John. It begins with the 'Christ the Son of God' in I Thessalonians 1, 10, and ends with 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God . . . and the Word was made flesh' of the Prologue to St John's Gospel, beginning with A.D. 51 and ending with the dying voice of the Beloved Apostle A.D. 100 c.

Let us make a little list of the divine titles attributed to Christ in the Epistles and Apocalypse:

Acts 2, 36—Lord and Christ.

Acts 5, 31—Prince and Saviour.

Rom. 9, 5—God, blessed for ever. (2 Peter I, 1).

Rom. 10, 12, etc.—Lord over all.

Rom. 14, 9—Lord of the living and the dead.

I Cor. 1, 24—Power of God.

I Cor. 1, 9—Son of God. (Thess. 1, 10; Heb. 1, 2.)

I Cor. 1, 24—Wisdom of God.

2 Cor. 4, 4—Image of God.

Gal. 2, 20—The Son of God. (Eph. 4, 13.)

Phil. 2—Equal with God.

Col. 1, 15—Image of the Invisible God.

I Tim. 1, 2, 12, etc.—Lord (and *passim* in the Epistles).

Heb. 1, 2—Heir of all things.

Heb. 1, 3—Brightness of the Father's Glory.

Heb. 1, 3—Figure of his substance.

Heb. 1, 3—Upholder of all things.

James 1, 1—Lord Jesus Christ of glory.

I Pet. 4, 5—Our judge.

I Pet. 1, 3—The Son of God. (I John 2, 22-24.)

2 Peter 1, 1—Our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I John 1, 10—The Word.

I John 4, 9—The Only-Begotten.

Apocalypse 1, 8—Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end.

If others said all this of Christ, what did he himself say? He said, when quoting Isaias upon the Messiah, that this very day that prophecy was being fulfilled. He called himself Lord of the Sabbath; he said that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah deserved a lesser fate for not listening to God than did the cities of the plain for not listening to him. He said that a greater than Jonas, and a greater than Solomon was here. He quoted the Commands of God and putting himself on the level with the divine Law-Giver said, 'But I say to you. . . .' The angels are his messengers; he is the king of the Kingdom of God; he is *the judge*, coming to judge the world on the last day, he is the *forgiver of sins*, both of which powers are God's own. He is not merely a Son of God, but the Son, God's own Son, when we all are his servants. He is the Christ, the son of the living God. When asked to explain how Abraham could have rejoiced to see his day, he replied: 'Before Abraham was made, I AM', thus echoing

the name that God called himself when Moses in the desert asked him his name: God had replied, 'I am who am'.

In the synoptic Gospels Christ is reported as having said: 'All things are delivered to me by my Father. And no one knoweth the Son, but the Father: neither doth any man know the Father, but the Son, and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal him' (Mt. 11, 27).

But it is in St John's Gospel that the titles our Lord gives himself are most abundant:

The Father and I are One.

The Source of Life.

The Light of the World.

The Way, the Truth and the Life.

The Bread of Life.

The Beginning.

The only-begotten of the Father.

The Bridegroom.

The Door.

The Prophet.

The Shepherd.

The Vine.

The Lord.

When we contemplate these stupendous titles, this all-embracing claim, and when we face the fact of the miracles done before multitudes and not denied, when we know the resurrection as the basic fact of all, then do we see that here is no mere man, nor any myth of the pre-historic world, but the mightiest event in history, the moment chosen from all eternity when God stepped down into his universe, to save it and free it from its sins, to lead it back unto himself.

We cannot ignore Christ any more than we can ignore our own life. He is God made man, our God and our all. If we lose him, we lose all, for nothing has sense outside him. All history since his death would be senseless without Christ, all history before his birth an unmeaning dream. Creation and creatures are all made new through him, with St John, in love and faith we cry

Come, Lord Jesus.

Some excuse themselves for not believing in Christ's divinity because he never said 'I am God'. But is their excuse valid? We must examine what those who heard him concluded from his sayings, his life, and his works. St Thomas the doubter cried out on his knees before the risen Master, 'My Lord and my God'. St John, in an outburst of wonder and of insight, wrote at the beginning of his Life of Jesus, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God . . . and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us'. St Paul in his letters to his dear Philippian converts wrote speaking of humility, 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who *being in the form of God*, thought it not robbery to be *equal with God*, but emptied himself taking the form of a slave'. St Peter, to conclude, though testimonies abound, called Jesus,

'Our God and Saviour Jesus Christ'.

## AN AMBASSADOR FROM HEAVEN

GERARD GROOTE

BY

A CANONESS REGULAR OF THE LATERAN



F Thomas à Kempis, in his *Life of Gerard Groote*, can speak of the world of his day as 'ever turning to yet more evil courses', John Busch, the Chronicler of Windesheim, and, like à Kempis, one of the earliest members of that Congregation, says, with his characteristic bluntness of speech, that it was 'set already upon the way which leadeth down to Hell'. For it was in 1340 that 'God, looking upon the world with the eye of Fatherly goodness and mercy, saw fit to make ready a light to enlighten the eyes of men and a lamp to show the way to Christ our Lord. This light was that reverend man of God, Gerard the Great, or, in the vulgar tongue, Groote, an inhabitant of Deventer in the diocese of Utrecht'. Endowed with 'wealth, honour, learning and high place', he passed, after brilliant school studies at home, first to Aachen and then to the Sorbonne, where he graduated in medicine and theology, as well as in law. He then returned home and was appointed Teacher in the Chapter School of Deventer, where he soon acquired a reputation as an educator and a leader of youth. He gathered round him scholars from all the neighbouring towns. At this time he was living a thoroughly worldly life, enjoying the revenues of two canonries, besides his own ample private means, 'pursuing the shadow of a great reputation rather than the glory of God'.

One day it chanced that Henry of Kalkar, Prior of a Carthusian monastery near Arnheim, and an old school fellow of Gerard's, had come into Utrecht, where the latter then was, on some business connected with his Order. He sought out his friend, and 'let down the net of exhortation to draw this great fish from the waves of worldliness'. He seems indeed to have indulged in some very plain speaking, reproaching Gerard for his pleasure-loving ways, and putting the Four Last Things so forcibly before him that his eyes were opened and his heart touched. The holy prior was able to return to his community rejoicing over 'this great fish that he had caught with the hook of Christ'. Gerard was indeed a changed man. He resigned his benefices, gave up his gay apparel and his life of ease, and began a new life of humility, austerity and above all of prayer. In the light which now shone round him he saw his own weakness and feared lest

the seed God had planted in his soul should be trodden under foot by men or devoured by the birds of the air, so he fled from the world and sought refuge with his Carthusian friends. He spent nearly three years with the monks, sharing their lives and rivalling them in mortification and fervour, though never bound by their vows. He was thus all unknowingly preparing himself for the mission God had in store for him, learning in his own person that of which he was to become a teacher. For in spite of their love and esteem for their holy guest, the Community realised that Gerard's was not a cloistered vocation. He was a light which was to shine to all the world, not to remain hidden in a monastery. So he left them and returned home, to spend another three years in prayer and study, before going out again into the world, this time as 'God's Ambassador'.

Before he began his public ministry he was ordained deacon (in his humility he never ventured to seek admission to the priesthood), and then obtained licence to preach from Florentius, Bishop of Utrecht, 'a prudent man and a lover of religion'. Armed with these credentials, Gerard began a campaign of intense activity, preaching throughout the country, and attracted large crowds by his eloquence, his fervour and above all by the beauty and simplicity of his message. As the Chronicler tells us, 'he laid the Gospel before the people'. So great was his success that the churches could not contain the numbers who came to hear him. He was forced to deliver sometimes as many as three sermons a day and even to prolong his preaching far into the night. 'Many, therefore both priests and honourable men and women were pricked to the heart and longed most earnestly to abandon the world and faithfully to serve God their Maker in faith, hope, charity and love of the things that are eternal'. But this religious revival could not pass unnoticed by the enemy of souls. Persecutions of all kinds were directed against Gerard. Defamatory reports of his life and teaching were spread abroad, but the erstwhile vain and arrogant young master of the arts and sciences of the secular life was now a master in the science of the saints. He bore all these attacks with the utmost patience and charity. Even when 'by edict craftily obtained' his license to preach was for a time withdrawn by the bishop, Gerard uttered no word of reproach or protest, but humbly accepted the ruling of his superiors, thus giving an example of that loyalty and submission to ecclesiastical authority which was to be so marked a characteristic of the Windesheim Congregation.

Amid all the slander and abuse which now fell upon him there was, however, one voice raised in friendly greeting, one hand stretched

out in brotherly kindness. It is pleasant to read of a certain unnamed friar preacher who now sent him a friendly letter, 'composed in elegant language, by which the master was much strengthened for the work of preaching'. The friar may not have attached very much importance to his action. It was perhaps to him but the literal carrying out of that fundamental precept of fraternal charity upon which his rule—that of St Augustine—is based. But to Gerard it probably meant much more. The sweet odour of Christ had been shed upon his path at a critical moment of his life. May we not think that its fragrance still lingered about him when, on his deathbed not many years later, he was called upon to make a choice which was to decide the whole future of his disciples, and fixed on the rule of St Augustine, pre-eminently the rule of charity, as that which they were to follow?

This period of enforced silence did not however last long, and it was never allowed by Gerard to become a period of idleness. Rather was it a welcome opportunity for the development of a work which had always been dear to his heart—the direction and organisation of his spiritual children into more defined groups. At the moment of his first 'conversion' he had dispossessed himself of his paternal inheritance, reserving for his own use only a couple of small rooms, entirely cut off from the rest of the house. When he returned from the Carthusian monastery, Gerard made over this building to what we might today perhaps call a 'Confraternity'. This was a group of pious women earning their bread by the labour of their hands, bound by no vows, but living together in chastity and in obedience to an annually elected Superior. Gerard meanwhile occupied his own quarters, dwelling in the strictest poverty and seclusion with one companion, his friend and disciple John Brinkerinck . . . and a dog. John Brinkerinck eventually became a person of note among his brethren, and in view of his later strictures upon the keeping of 'little hondekens', one wonders in what light he regarded his master's pet. Did he look upon it as a regrettable weakness in one otherwise so holy? If it was a weakness, we today can only think of it as a very human and lovable one.

There was also another group in which Gerard was interested, the clerics and scholars from the School of Deventer, which was then at the height of its fame. Many of these had placed themselves under his guidance and Gerard, 'seeing that their number was ever increasing, and that they were burning with zeal for the heavenly warfare', arranged regular meetings for prayer and spiritual exhortations. A number of these young men were kept by him in regular employment, chiefly in the transcription of the Scriptures and of the

works of the Fathers, for Gerard was ever a noted lover of books and of holy reading. He moreover allowed such as were willing to live together under the direction of Florentius Radewyn, a priest of Deventer who had been converted by Gerard's preaching and example. One day—it was probably in 1381—Florentius said: 'Beloved master, what doth hinder that I and the clerks whose will is good should put together the gains that we earn each week and live in common?' But Gerard hesitated. . . . 'A Community . . . ? a Community . . . ?' For he knew that such a foundation would meet with much opposition. Then Florentius continued: 'But what harm if we should begin? Perhaps God will grant us success'. Then Gerard, after musing in his heart a little space, said: 'In the name of the Lord, then, begin. I will be your defender and faithful protector'. So Florentius and the clerks of good will made a beginning of the common life, which they held to be the way of perfection, having been instituted in the Primitive Church by the holy Apostles under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. They took no vows, but by common consent agreed to lead this life perpetually, under obedience to Florentius. By the advice of Gerard, a few simple rules were laid down, 'which the Sisters who dwelt in Master Gerard's house' also followed. Thus began the double Congregation of the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life, or of the New Devotion.

Its history can here be only very briefly resumed. Benefactors came forward, houses were built, and the members multiplied. They devoted themselves first of all to the cultivation of their own interior life, and then to the spread of Christian learning by means of literature and education. The influence of their ascetical writings is recognised by all, notably, for example, that of Gerard of Zutphen, which is traced in the composition of the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius. The controversy over the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ* still continues to spring up from time to time, although it might seem that a very slight acquaintance with Windesheim and its spirit would suffice to settle the matter. The schools of *The Common Life* became famous, and gradually developed into centres for the teaching, not only of the elements of secular knowledge, but also of philosophy and theology. But the brethren did more than merely impart learning, they fostered the spiritual life of their pupils, and became in the true sense of the word, reformers of the clerical and monastical life in the Netherlands and in Germany. The foundation of the University of Louvain in 1425 and the rise of other religious congregations devoted to teaching caused a decline in the importance of their schools, and few survived the double storm of Reformation and revolution which later broke over Europe. But the Brethren of the

Common Life had done their work: they had ploughed and sown. What matter who reaps the harvest, so long as the hungry have bread?

But there remained disciples of Gerard Groote who had no special call to the apostolate either of writing or of teaching. They were, so to speak, the Marys of his spiritual family, more anxious to be fed by the master than to feed others. For these Gerard had long wanted to found a house where they could live a regular cloistered life, but the opportunity had so far been lacking and he had not yet been able to take any definite step. It was while these things were in his mind that he determined to journey into Brabant, to visit the holy Prior of the Canons Regular of Groenendael, John Ruysbroeck, for he longed to see face to face one whom he so far knew only from his books. Thomas à Kempis, from whom we learn of this visit, gives us very little definite information as to what passed. We know of the kindly and courteous welcome given by the aged Prior (to whom the identity of his guest had been divinely revealed) and of a few happy days spent in the monastery, where Gerard was shown over the whole building. He spent much time in intimate converse with his host, from whom he learned many secrets of the spiritual life. We have, however, two pen pictures of the outward and of the homeward journeys from which we can gather an idea of what this visit meant and what it did for Gerard. We see him setting out with his two companions, his great friend, John Cele, Rector of the school of Zwolle, and Gerard the Shoemaker, 'their inseparable companion in this undertaking'. They are all eagerness and animation, discoursing as they go of the edification they hope to receive and of how they can best put it to profit. On coming back Gerard is a different man. He is purified in heart and he is silent, pondering in his heart the things he has heard, things too deep evidently for speech. It was shortly after this that the soul of Blessed John Ruysbroeck returned to God, having, as was revealed to Gerard, passed 'but one hour in Purgatory'.

For Gerard, too, the end was approaching. A short time after the visit to Groenendael, Deventer, Gerard's native town, was stricken by one of those epidemics of the plague, so frequent in the Middle Ages, and his charity and skill in leechcraft were at once put at the service of his fellow townsmen. At the bedside of one of his friends he himself contracted the disease. He knew enough of medicine to realise that his case was hopeless. So in the utmost calm and peace of conscience he set about putting his house in order. He called together all the devout Fathers and Brothers who were with Florentius and spoke openly to them of his coming death. But his message

was one of encouragement and consolation. He promised to continue to act as their Father and Protector in heaven (while Florentius took his place on earth) and foretold, too, the continuance and stability of their Congregation. But to ensure this he advised such as were willing to join themselves to one of the regular Orders approved by the Church. In their fervour they were ready to adopt at his word the strict enclosure of the Carthusians or the austerity of the Cistercians, well knowing Gerard's affection for the members of these two Orders. But his choice for them had already been made: the Rule of St Augustine, which did not differ much from that under which they had been living so long, and it was the Rule of charity and simplicity, the two virtues ever dearest to his heart.

'So, as the day of St Bernard was drawing to its close, Gerard saw his glorious patrons Augustine and Bernard enter in at the door and await the passing forth of his soul from his body . . . and just after the fifth hour of that day he delivered up to God his happy soul, a soul meet to be crowned for ever in the glory of charity with the saints and elect of God.' It was August 20th, 1384.

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## THE ASCENSION

BY

ST AUGUSTINE<sup>1</sup>

*Translated by* E. J. B. FRY

1. The Resurrection and Ascension fill up the full measure of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. We celebrate his resurrection on Easter Sunday; the Ascension we celebrate today. For us both days are sacred. He rose again to put before us a proof of resurrection; he ascended to give us protection from on high. And Jesus Christ is our Lord and Saviour, first as he hung on the cross, then seated in heaven. He paid our purchase-money when he hung on the cross; he gathers what he bought when he sitteth in heaven. For when he has gathered all whom, throughout time, he does gather, then, at the end of time, will he come. *God shall come manifestly* (Ps. 49, 3), as it is written, not hiddenly as he first came, but openly. For it was right for him to come hiddenly when he was to be judged, but he will come openly to judge. For if the Lord had first come openly, who would have dared to judge him when he was openly known? The apostle Paul indeed says: *If they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of Glory* (I Cor. 2, 8). But if he had not been put

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<sup>1</sup> *Tractatus Inediti*. Ed. Dom Germain Morin, xxi.

to death, death would not have died: the devil was conquered by his own victory. When first he flung man down into death by his seduction, the devil was exultant. By deceit he killed the first man; by killing the new Man he lost the first from his snare.

2. Therefore the true victory of our Lord Jesus Christ was gained when he rose and ascended into heaven; and what you heard when the Apocalypse was read was then fulfilled: *the Lion of the tribe of Judah* has prevailed (Apoc. 5, 5). He is called the Lion and he is also called the Lamb: lion for fortitude, lamb for innocence; lion because he is unconquerable, lamb because he is meek. And when that Lion has been put to death, by his very death he conquers the other lion that seeketh whom he may devour. For the devil is called a lion for savagery, not for strength. And so the apostle Peter says: It behoves us to watch against temptations because *your adversary the devil goeth about seeking whom he may devour* (I Peter 5, 8). But he also told *how* he goes about: *He goeth about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour* (Ibid.). We should all have run into the jaws of this lion unless the Lion of the tribe of Judah had prevailed. Against a lion, the Lion; against a wolf, the Lamb. The devil was exultant when Christ died, and in that very death of Christ the devil was conquered. It was as though he went into a mousetrap to take food. He was the emperor of death and rejoiced in this death, and what he rejoiced at became a snare for himself. The Lord's cross was like a mousetrap for the devil. The Lord's death was the bait by which he was ensnared. For see, our Lord Jesus Christ rose again. What now has become of death which hung upon the tree? What of the insults of the Jews? Where is the arrogance and pride of those who wagged their heads before the cross, saying: *If he be the Son of God let him come down from the cross?* (Matt. 27, 40, 42). See, he did more than they required in that mockery, for it is a greater thing to rise again from the tomb than to come down from the tree.

3. And now great indeed is the glory of his ascension into heaven, his sitting at the right hand of the Father. But this we do not see with our eyes, for neither did we see him hanging on the tree, nor look upon him rising again from the tomb. We hold all this by faith. We perceive with the heart's eyes. We are praised because we did not see and have believed. For the Jews also saw Christ. It is no great thing to see Christ with the bodily eyes, but it is indeed a great thing to believe in Christ with the heart's eyes. Indeed if Christ were present and stood before us and held his peace, how should we know who he was? And then if he were silent how should we benefit? Is it not better that he should be absent but speak to us in the Gospel, than present but silent? And yet he is not absent if you hold him in

your heart. Believe in him and you see him. He is not before your eyes and yet he possesses your heart. For if he were not with us what we have heard would be a lie: *Behold I am with you even unto the consummation of the world* (Matt. 28, 20).

## THE MEDIEVAL GUEST

BY

TUDOR EDWARDS



HE exhortations and counsel of St Benedict in his Rule on the reception of guests are too well known to be repeated here. Their importance however can never be sufficiently stressed and their wisdom and beauty can never be sufficiently praised. There is in the Luxembourg Museum of Paris a painting by Dauban of a stranger being received by a convent. It is a perfect interpretation of the 53rd chapter of the Rule, with a poignant beauty and a moral for all humanity.

Doubtless there were guests even among the primitive communities in the deserts of Nitria and the Thebaid, although such a speculation is beyond the scope of the present essay. During the earlier history of the monasteries, the 11th and 12th centuries for example, hospitality was a *sine qua non* of monastic life. In some cases, indeed, as of the abbeys of Reading and Battle, the foundation-charters indicated that the providing of such hospitality in the district was the motive of the founder.

The relationship between Church and State, between Church and Society, was then very different from what it is today. The Church was closely interwoven with the entire national fabric. The monastery was church, school, inn, sometimes bank, and often judicial court. It was the forerunner of the large guest-house type of inn that we know today. Such lodging-houses and ale-houses as existed were inadequate and could not compete with the comfort of monastic guest-houses. Thus it was that nobles with their retinues, ministers and prelates, aristocracy and peasants, planned their journeys, as near as possible, to touch points at which religious houses were situated, for the monks provided good beds, clean linen, good liquor, meat and bread, and often entertainment.

The normal stay of visitors was two days and two nights, but the privilege was often abused, particularly by the influential. Hospitality became, economically, such a heavy burden on many houses that Edward I forbade anyone to eat or lodge in a religious house unless such a person was the founder or had been invited by the

superior and even then his consumption was to be moderate. His successor, Edward II, had fewer scruples, and his visit to the abbey of Peterborough in 1310 was said to have cost the abbot £1543 13s. 4d. Earlier, many houses had suffered from the prolonged and frequent visits of King John, and Jocelyn of Brakelond has described John's visit to Bury St Edmunds, when the only present the King left behind was a silk scarf—which his servants had borrowed from the sacristan of the abbey and never paid for. The higher secular clergy were equally exacting; bishops with large corteges often made a convenience of monasteries while on journeys of diocesan visitation, and even archdeacons on parochial missions would be accompanied by a score or so of horsemen. But perhaps the classic instance of this form of abuse is presented in the early sixteenth-century record of a man who arrived with wife and seven children at a guesthouse and did not leave it until nearly seven years later, though doubtless this period embraced the eve and aftermath of the Dissolution.

Religious houses for women suffered particularly in this respect. Gentlewomen made temporary homes of them, often staying for a year or more. The reception of large numbers of fashionable laywomen created many anomalies, and was in a large measure responsible for the disorders and laxity which prevailed in such nunneries as the Fontevraultine house of Nuneaton.

Originally, the upper western claustral range (except in Cistercian houses) was allotted to guests. Later, the larger houses extended this further westward or built a special house (*domus hospitum*). The Carthusians invariably ranged the guest-quarters around an outer court or Little Cloister. Guests were not, originally, allowed within the enclosure, and they encountered the convent only in church. Such an arrangement prevailed at the abbey of Monte Cassino right up to its recent destruction.

At the Cistercian abbey of Fountains at the beginning of the 13th century, Abbot John of Kent built a guesthouse 'to receive Christ's poor as well as the great ones of the world'. Today however the remains of two guesthouses can be seen, indicating that 'the great ones' were later segregated. This pertained at Kirkstall and other Cistercian houses. At Cleve Abbey there seem to have been four separate guest-houses, one for the upper classes, one for the poor, one for travelling Cistercians (those on business, not the *gyrovagi*) and one for religious of other Orders. The double guest-house was also to be found at such Benedictine houses as those of Canterbury and Evesham. This arrangement cannot be strictly regarded as a later innovation, however, for it can be seen on a ninth-century plan of St Gall.

At Glastonbury, 'the guesthouse was an apartment for the entertainment of strangers, and for the reception of travellers. Here all persons, from the prince to the peasant, were entertained, according to their rank and quality. And none were commanded to depart, if they were orderly and of good behaviour'. Later, it became the practice to entertain the aristocracy in the superior's house, the better classes in the guesthouse, and the poor in the almonry or gatehouse.

In such circumstances it is not difficult to see why the guestmaster or hosteller should be a man of high vocation, moral integrity and goodwill, a man of great tact, patience and experience. His duties could be exacting, his obligations numerous, his responsibilities infinite, and his vocation sorely tried. In addition to being responsible for the welfare of guests and the furnishing of their quarters, he might be called upon to provide medical attention or to see that the horses of travellers were newly-shod and cared for. The latter constituted no mean task; at St Albans there was stabling for three hundred horses, while the abbey of Abingdon had a special endowment to meet the cost of shoeing horses of guests.

At the Augustinian house of Barnwell the hosteller was to have 'elegant manners and a respectable bringing-up'. His duties were minutely laid down. He had to maintain 'cups without flaws; spoons of silver . . . sheets not merely clean but untorn . . . fire that does not smoke . . . writing materials' and a host of amenities in a guesthouse strewn with rushes underfoot.<sup>1</sup>

At Durham the 'Geste Haule' on the east side of the curia had separate lodgings and was served from the prior's kitchen. The guestmaster here was known as the 'terror' (terrarius), and he was 'appoynted to geve intertaynment to all staitis' and to care for 'the goodnes of ther diett, the sweete and daintie furnetur of ther lodgings, and generally all things necessarie for traveillers'.<sup>2</sup>

The presence of guests often led to unavoidable interruptions of the daily monastic life. At Clairvaux under the abbacy of St Bernard guests arrived and departed so frequently that St Bernard quietly complained of the loss of solitude and the interrupting of his writing and preaching to the brethren. 'I will go forth unto the guests, lest anything be found lacking in that love whereof I am even now discoursing unto you'.

The arrangements for guests were most strict in the Cistercian houses (if we except the Carthusians). According to the Statutes, when a new abbey had been built, women were to be allowed to visit it for nine days but could not pass a night in it. The usual practice

<sup>1</sup> *Customary of Barnwell.*

<sup>2</sup> *Rites of Durham.*

of monks generally in the thirteenth century was to prohibit all women visitors except noble ladies and the sisters of the monks. The wisdom of these strictures can be gauged from the embarrassing consequences which often followed the admittance of women as guests. As in the Chuniac guesthouses of Lenton (where Henry III stayed in 1230), where, in 1263, the wife of Nicholas de Cantlow gave birth to a son who was duly baptised in the priory church on Palm Sunday.

Guests also created, indirectly, certain anomalies. Although St Benedict had prescribed that the Silence after Compline could be broken on account of guests, this was obviously not the ideal and was, perhaps, a regrettable compromise. Diet too was affected. Lanfranc, following earlier tradition, prohibited the eating of meat and luxuries to all monks except those in the infirmary, but by the end of the 12th century such fare was allowed to those dining in the abbot's room and to those dining with guests.<sup>3</sup> The precedent being established, there was some tendency for this state of affairs to develop, and Geraldus Cambrensis has recorded a dinner at Canterbury, at which he was a guest, whereat sixteen courses were served with an abundance of wines.

Both the *Regularis Concordia* and the *Carta Caritatis* decreed that superiors should always eat in the refectory, at a separate table, while guests normally dined in their own quarters. The general practice seems to have been a combination of the two, the guests sitting at the abbot's table in the refectory.

During the later Middle Ages, when society became more complex and monastic administration more involved, the practice crept in whereby the Superior had his own dwelling and household. One immediate result of this was a more complete segregation of social classes than already existed. While hospitality was still dispensed to all, the reception of the affluent was carried to extremes and entertainment was on a lavish scale.

The Benedictine houses of Durham, Winchester, Norwich and Finchale and the Augustinian houses of Maxstoke and Dunmow hired players, mummers, jugglers, minstrels and musicians. The account rolls of these houses refer to *mimi*, *joculatores*, *jocatores*, *lusores* and *citharistae*. At Finchale there was an apartment known as 'le Playerchambre'.

Richard Whiting, last Abbot of Glastonbury, sometimes entertained five hundred persons of fashion at a single sitting. Some allowance should be made however for the unique position in affairs of State held by mitred abbots at the beginning of the 16th century. Such lordly feasts were often diplomatic gestures, and were more than

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<sup>3</sup> *Lanfranci Statuta*.

offset by the generous alms distributed to the poor of a very wide area twice a week.

Such men as Abbot Whiting, living in a new age of hedonism, yet saw Christ in the common man. And many a common man found Christ in a monastic hostelry. The guesthouse dispensed not food and drink merely. It gave out love, hope and charity—and peace.

Tradition has it that Dante knocked one evening upon the door of a remote convent in the Apennines. On being asked what he wished, he replied simply, *Pax*.

## CORRESPONDENCE

*To the Editor, LIFE OF THE SPIRIT.*

Dear Sir,

A few months ago one of your readers, Mr G. Sexton, called the writer's attention to a remarkable book published in New York just before the outbreak of the last war. This book, *The Following of Christ*, carries the *imprimatur* of Cardinal Hayes, Archbishop of New York; but owing probably to the unsettled condition of world affairs during recent years, it seems to have been overlooked on this side of the Atlantic. It professes to give conclusive proof that *The Imitation* was originally written in low German by Gerard Groote, the founder of the Brethren of the Common Life; and that Thomas à Kempis—a member of the same Order—was given the task some years later of translating and copying the low German MS into Latin. It is stated that this manuscript was discovered in 1921 at Lubeck by the city librarian, and was edited by Dr James Van Ginneken, S.J., of Nymegen. After the Introduction, which amplifies these points, the remainder of the book is given up to a translation from the Lubeck manuscript into English, by a Joseph Malaise, S.J.

Assuming for a moment (perhaps a wide assumption) that all the facts in the Introduction can be verified, there is a very good case indeed for attributing the authorship to Gerard Groote. And when comparing the translation with the Latin of Thomas à Kempis, the case becomes even stronger.

This is the briefest hint of the book's purport, and there are many ramifications, such as alleged alterations and additions made by à Kempis. Many questions also remain to be asked, such as—was the Lubeck MS lost in the terrible air bombardment of that city, and what is known of the translator Joseph Malaise?

This old controversy concerning the authorship of *The Imitation* is, of course, one for the scholar-specialist and the master of minutiae; but there are a few broader considerations which may interest the general reader. In the first place it is interesting to recall the well known literary connection between Gerard Groote and Thomas à Kempis. Thomas wrote the life of Gerard, *Vita Gerardi Magni*, and also translated into Latin some of Gerard's shorter pieces, for example, *De sacris Libris studendis*. Again, the subscription of the celebrated Antwerp Codex has always been accepted as clear evidence that Thomas was the author. It runs: *Finitus et completus anno domini MCCCCXLI per manus fratris Thomae Kempensis in Monte Agnetis prope Zwolles*. But a little thought leads to the conclusion that these words are more likely to have been written by a translator and copyist than by the author. A copyist would naturally stress his hand-work, *per manus*. *Finitus et completus* seems to convey a feeling of relief at the end of a laborious task, and the composer and author would not have chosen these two words—at least so it appears to this writer. Another point: Thomas à Kempis was a most prolific writer. In a seven-volume modern edition we find long sermons, short homilies, biographies, hymns and verses, stories of the saints, prayers, meditations—all these in addition to *The Imitation* which forms a very small part of his works. How is it that this one fragment has won world-wide appreciation, whilst all the rest is only dipped into by the scholar or by an occasional inquisitive general reader? What are the implications of this fact?

A comparison between the two men may also throw some light on the controversy. Thomas à Kempis's long life was spent in a monastery. His Latin sermons were given to small communities of monks and novices. He knew little of the outside world. But Gerard Groote was a popular preacher who addressed crowded congregations in their mother tongue. Before his radical change, when at the age of 33 he turned from all earthly consolations, he had led the life of a wealthy and worldly churchman. He possessed ample means, held two lucrative prebends, had travelled widely, mixing with every section of society, and had acquired a deep and extensive knowledge of the human heart. Assuming once more that he was the writer of *The Imitation*, might not these facts account for the wonderful book's universal appeal. But this argument, based on a comparison between the two men, cuts both ways, as the following will show. Gerard was a great lover and collector of MSS, both sacred and secular; and in order that he might be able to refute any possible opponents, on his preaching tours he carried with him a chest filled

with manuscripts of the Fathers and other writers. This is quite contrary to the spirit of *The Imitation*, for we all know how lightly Thomas à Kempis esteemed human wisdom and learning.

But, as I said before, here is a problem for the scholar-specialist. It may be he already knows this book with its claim for Gerard Groote, and in that case he must pardon this writer's presumption.

If, on the other hand, the book has been overlooked, you might, Sir, consider bringing it before your readers; and no doubt within your Oxford or Paris circle you could find someone competent to make a comparison between the two men and, at the same time, deal with this latest claimant to the authorship of *The Imitation*.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN SEARLE.

## REVIEWS

PARDON AND PEACE. By Alfred Wilson, C.P. (Sheed & Ward; 10s. 6d.)

A practical study of the sacrament of Penance, breezily written. Some points emphasised are the distinction of necessary and unnecessary matter; the primary importance of contrition; the danger of 'piety' falsifying one's judgment on self; the unhealthiness of a 'safety first' attitude in the matter of doubtful sins. 'The belief—inculcated in Catholic schools?—that conscience is a still, small voice, is attacked roundly as leading ultimately to moral judgment which is subjective in a bad sense. 'Disastrous misconceptions of conscience have arisen because it is often confused with fuss, feeling, fuddle and fif. . . . Fuddle about conscience leaves the door wide open to obstinacy, intuition, scruples and fif (by fif is meant a tendency to substitute emotional intuition for reason) (p. 105). . . . Beware of the voice, special faculty theory of conscience' (p. 117). quotations which give a sample of the style. In fact all the bad misconceptions of untutored devotion are opposed by a moral sanity based on theological conceptions of God, sin and the sacrament. But Fr Wilson is limited by the need he feels to attack an unhealthy mentality. When he speaks of the 'centre of gravity', of God in whom thought and desire should converge, he admits that the problem is not one of correcting isolated errors of moral judgment but of a total religious education in which, so far as moral judgment in particular is concerned, an adequate doctrine of the virtue of prudence and of natural and supernatural human action must play a leading part.

DAMIAN MAGRATH, O.P.

FROM HUNTING FIELD TO CLOISTER. By M. M. Xavier Gwynn.  
(Clonmore & Reynolds; 8s. 6d.)

A pleasantly written book, giving us the lives of two Irish women, members of a large family of Ryans living near Limerick. It covers many years, for the eldest sister, Eugenie, known at home as Jinny, was born in 1853, while Bertha, the youngest but two of the family, only died in 1942. Eugenie became a nun of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus at St Leonards, where all the girls of the family were educated, two years after she left school as soon as the next sister came home to take her place, Bertha, eleven years younger, entered the same Community at the age of twenty-six when she had been 'in the world' some years.

Both sisters had the background of Irish country life. Each in her day rode to hounds, which in Eugenie's time was unusual for women; and each in her day rode hard and even 'led the hunt'. Both were thoroughly normal young women, enjoying their riding and tennis and dancing; neither was in the least the type which in popular imagination is likely to become a nun. But the normal cheerful type usually makes the best nuns. And so it turned out with these two. We are told that both reached a high degree of sanctity.

Except for their straight, simple outlook, the sisters were not much alike. Eugenie, or to call her by her name in religion, Mother Aloysius, was a delightfully spontaneous person. She had a habit of calling everyone 'darling', from the shyest of newly arrived postulants to (so tradition has it) the Prime Minister of England, then Mr Asquith, when as guest mistress she was showing him the historic old hall, now the chapel of the Mayfield Convent.

Mother Mary Magdalen, her sister, who had been the 'quiet' member of the family, was more reserved in her manner, though she, too, was blessed with the Irish sense of humour which, combined with her understanding of human nature and her sound common sense, made her a wonderfully successful mistress of novices. She would even use slang if it seemed to her the best way of dealing with a special case. It is recorded that once when treated to a would-be tragic tirade from a young novice, Mother Mary Magdalen merely replied: 'My dear, you know that's all bosh!' and walked on. It had the desired effect of bringing the young woman to her senses from sheer surprise at such an answer from the Mistress of Novices. We are told that the novice, recounting the incident later with many a chuckle, added: 'And it *was* all bosh!' Mother Mary Magdalen kept notes on spiritual matters as they occurred to her. Some of these notes, short and to the point, are given in the chapter on her interior life.

This book would be a welcome addition to any community library, and could most certainly be 'read in the refectory'.

FFLORENS ROCH.

DARTFORD PRIORY: A HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH DOMINICANESSES. By the Dominican Nuns of Headington. (Blackfriars Publications; 2s. 6d.)

*Blackfriars Publications* are to be warmly congratulated on their courage and initiative in renewing publication at a time which abounds with difficulties of every kind. It is fitting that among the first of such enterprises they should launch this brief but fragrant little sketch of the only house of Dominican Sisters in medieval England. The title is perhaps somewhat misleading. Of the pamphlet's sixty-five pages, only eleven deal with the history of Dartford Priory; the surrounding chapters—four in all—describe the foundation of the post-Reformation community in 1661 and the subsequent vicissitudes of its life to the present day.

In the treatment of the function and technique of Dominican women in general, it is assumed throughout that the life of the modern 'Second Order' Dominican is the authentic and only traditional ideal for women, originating in the mind of the Founder. It is at least a debatable point whether St Dominic intended all his daughters to rest behind grille and enclosure wall. Prouille, his first foundation, was instituted perhaps primarily for the instruction of Catholic children and converted heretics, with study and monastic observance as means to this end. It seems probable that at Prouille there was no rigid enclosure until this was imposed in 1298 by the Constitution *periculosus* of Boniface VIII. (De Statu Regularium VI, iii, 16.)

In view of these facts, might it not be suggested that the modern Dominican Sisters devoted to the labours of the apostolate, with a background of study and monastic practice, represent at least as authentic a traditional development as the life of those who give themselves exclusively to contemplation? The term, 'Sisters of the Third Order Regular', is surely a misnomer involving an essential contradiction. By the assumption of the obligations of the monastic life with the stability of perpetual vows, are they not at once excluded from the category of Tertiaries who, by long tradition, are presumed to be living in the secular state, engaged in the pursuit of a secular career? The First Letter of the Most Reverend Fr Bonaventura Garcia de Paredes, O.P., Master General of the Order, which is addressed to the entire Dominican Order (25th December, 1926) would seem to support this view. In this letter he interprets the ideal of St Dominic as a three-fold Order of Friars, Sisters, and secular Tertiaries.

May we hope that, having given us this very pleasing introduction, the Dominicans of Headington will advance to a more ambitious and detailed study of the unpublished historical material relating to Dartford Priory?

S. MARY LAURENCE, O.P.

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